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Item 121 of the provisional agenda*

PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Control and limitation of documentation: provision of written meeting records to subsidiary organs of the General Assembly

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

As indicated in paragraph 4 of document A/50/263, the annex to the present addendum contains the replies received from the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

* A/50/150.

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Annex

I. COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

Letter from the Secretary of the Committee

[Original: English]

[27 June 1995]

... I wish to confirm that the Committee considered this matter carefully through its Working Group on Working Methods and decided on the utilization of unedited transcripts of its sessions in lieu of verbatim records. For ease of reference, attached is an excerpt of the draft report of the Committee to the General Assembly dealing with this matter (A/AC.105/L.208/Add.3, paras. 15-19). The final report will be submitted to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session in document A/50/20.

"The Committee recalled General Assembly resolutions 48/222 B of 23 December 1993 and 49/221 B of 23 December 1994, in which the [General Assembly] had requested the cooperation of those bodies entitled to written records, particularly verbatim records, to review and justify the need for such records.

"The Committee noted with satisfaction that, in accordance with its request, the Secretariat had provided it with information on alternatives to verbatim records that might be available to the Committee, as contained in document A/AC.105/L.207.

"In accordance with the request of the Committee, a Working Group of the Whole was established to discuss, inter alia, the records of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies ...

"On the basis of the discussion held in the Working Group of the Whole, the Committee agreed that, beginning with its thirty-eighth session in 1996, it would be provided with unedited transcripts of its sessions in lieu of verbatim records.

"The Committee also agreed to request the Legal Subcommittee to review, at its thirty-fifth session in 1996, its requirement for summary records with a view to determining whether it may be possible to utilize unedited transcripts at its subsequent sessions and to consider under what circumstances there might be a need to revert to summary records should a decision be taken to utilize unedited transcripts."

II. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Letter from the Chairman of the Executive Committee

[Original: English]

[29 June 1995]

At its meeting on 4 April 1995, the Executive Committee's Subcommittee on Administrative and Financial Matters considered the question of summary records. The following facts were recalled:

(a) The decision to streamline the report of the Executive Committee in 1987 and 1988 was explicitly premised upon the existence of summary records to compensate for the elimination of a narrative account of meetings from the text of the report. Cancellation of the right to summary records would thus call into question the current basis of the presentation of the report, making it difficult to maintain the shorter length;

(b) The Executive Committee has always reached its conclusions and decisions by consensus and, in view of the humanitarian and strictly apolitical nature of the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has made a point of never resorting to a vote. The elimination of summary records, which provide scope for a reflection of the statements, explanations and reservations of delegations, might precipitate a break with the well-established tradition of consensus and be prejudicial to the spirit of the Executive Committee's work;

(c) In the case of the Executive Committee, summary records have been cut back to 24 hours of meetings and have relatively minor financial implications when compared to the total cost of Executive Committee documentation.

The Subcommittee recommended that the Executive Committee adopt a decision reaffirming the importance of summary records of its debates. At an extraordinary session of the Executive Committee held under my chairmanship on 20 June 1995, the Executive Committee decided that there was a strong justification and valid need to maintain summary records of its proceedings and requested me to convey its views to the General Assembly through the Committee on Conferences. The relevant decision of the Executive Committee appears in paragraph 8 of the report of that meeting, which has been issued under the symbol A/AC.96/843, and reads as follows:

"Decision on the reconsideration by the Executive Committee of its need for summary records

"The Executive Committee,

"Noting General Assembly resolution 49/221 B of 23 December 1994 which requests that the Executive Committee submit to the General Assembly

through the Committee on Conferences, justifications for the continuation of the current entitlement to summary records,

"Recalling that, in view of its entitlement to summary records, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 37/14 C of 16 November 1982, the Executive Committee has eliminated all summaries of discussion from its report,

"Noting with concern that elimination of summary records would run counter to measures taken to reduce the length of the Executive Committee report,

"Recalling current initiatives of the Executive Committee to reduce further the volume of documentation provided to it,

"Noting that Executive Committee requirements for summary records have been reduced to 24 hours of meeting time and account for a modest percentage of overall meeting costs,

"Reaffirming the importance of summary records in reflecting statements, explanations and reservations of delegations and thus in facilitating the preservation of the tradition of consensus in decision-making,

"(a) Concludes that there is a strong justification and a valid need to maintain summary records of its proceedings;

"(b) Requests the Chairman of the Executive Committee to convey its views to the General Assembly through the Committee on Conferences."

III. SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

Letter from the Secretary of the Committee

[Original: English]

[20 July 1995]

Further to the letter dated 13 February 1995 relating to the meeting records of the Special Committee which had been reproduced in the annex to document A/50/263, I wish to inform you that on the recommendation of its Working Group the Special Committee decided on 14 July 1995 (A/AC.109/PV.1449) to replace its verbatim records by summary records.